

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSC-07 PA-04

RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 AID-20 OMB-01 CU-04 PC-10

OPR-02 IO-14 SIL-01 LAB-06 EB-11 COME-00 SY-04 DRC-01

/154 W

----- 109026

O R 312202Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3269

INFO BUENOS AIRES 2292

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 3550

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, BL

SUBJ: RISING POLITICAL TENSIONS

REF: LA PAZ 3504: LA PAZ 3295

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: POLITICAL UNREST STIMULATED BY SEPARATE ISSUES OF ECONOMIC AGREEMENTS WITH BRAZIL AND UNIVERSITY SITUATION, REPORTED IN REFTELS, IS NOW BRINGING TOGETHER DISPARATE ANTI-GOVERNMENT GROUPS AND MOVEMENTS IN RISING CAMPAIGN OF AGITATION AGAINST BANZER REGIME. AMONG OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO INCREASED POLITICAL TENSION OF PAST FEW DAYS ARE PRO-VALVERDE FLANGISTAS, LARGE NUMBER OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, A GROUP OF JUNIOR AND MIDDLE-GRADE MILITARY OFFICERS, SOME LABOR UNIONS AND VESTIGES OF PDC-PRA-MNRI POLITICAL ALLIANCE. GOVERNMENT IS AWARE OF DANGER IT FACES, AS DEMONSTRATED BY EMERGENCY MEETINGS OF PRESIDENT BANZER WITH MILITARY HIGH COMMAND AND SECURITY OFFICIALS, AND IS PREPARING COUNTER-MEASURES TO DEAL WITH SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

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2. AS REPORTED IN REFTLS, POLITICAL TENSIONS HAVE BEEN

KEPT AT RELATIVELY HIGH LEVEL THROUGHOUT MAY BY SEPARATE ISSUES OF ECONOMIC AGREEMENTS WITH BRAZIL AND SUBSEQUENT DETERIORATION IN UNIVERSITY SITUATION. WITHIN PAST FEW DAYS, EMBASSY HAS GATHERED NEW INFORMATION INDICATING THAT CURRENTS OF UNREST SYMBOLIZED BY THESE TWO ISSUES ARE NOW UNITING INTO BROADER ANTI-GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN OF AGITATION. ONE KEY ELEMENT IN NEW SITUATION IS INCREASED ACTIVITY OF GROUP OF YOUNGER MILITARY OFFICERS, AT JUNIOR AND MIDDLE GRADES, WHO HAVE OFTEN BEEN REPORTED IN PAST TO ENGAGE IN LOW-LEVEL PLOTTING AGAINST GOVERNMENT. THESE OFFICERS, WHO INCREASINGLY APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN MAJOR PROVOCATIVE ELEMENT IN JANUARY DISTURBANCES IN COCHABAMBA, ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED OVER ISSUE OF BOLIVIA'S ECONOMIC "DEPENDENCY" ON BRAZIL AND MAY ALSO HAVE HELPED TO STIMULATE RECENT STUDENT DISORDERS IN LA PAZ AND SUCRE. ON EDUCATIONAL SCENE, ALL UNIVERSITY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE CURRENTLY ON STRIKE IN LA PAZ AND SUCRE. IN LATTER CITY, FOUR DAYS OF DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE LEFT ESTIMATED THIRTY STUDENTS AND TEN POLICE INJURED: REPORTS OF MORE SERIOUS CASUALTIES AMONG STUDENTS CANNOT BE CONFIRMED AT PRESENT. SUPPORT BY ALL MAJOR LABOR UNIONS FOR STUDENT DEMANDS IN PAST TWO WEEKS ALSO CREATES IMPRESSION OF GROWING ALLIANCE OF OPPORTUNITY BETWEEN VARIOUS OPPOSITION FORCES. IN FACE OF THIS SITUATION, FSB DECLARED NATIONAL MOBILIZATION OF PARTY MEMBERS "IN ARMS" ON MAY 30, IN ORDER TO OPPOSE ALLEGED SUBVERSIVE MOVEMENT AIMED AT GOVERNMENT'S OVERTHROW. ON SAME DAY, FOUR MEMBERS OF FALANGE AND EX-COMMANDER OF MILITARY AVIATION SCHOOL COL HUGO MUNOZ DEPARTED SANTA CRUZ INTO "VOLUNTARY EXILE" ALL FIVE MEN HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED IN PAST WITH PRO-VALVERDE FORCES IN SANTA CRUZ AREA. FINALLY, SPOKESMEN FOR PDC-PRA-MNRI ALLIANCE CONTINUE TO ISSUE SHRILL COMMUNIQUE DENOUNCING BANZER GOVERNMENT FOR HAVING "ERASED LAST VESTIGES OF DEMOCRACY IN BOLIVIA" BY ITS RECENT ARRESTS OF STUDENT LEADERS, LABOR OFFICIALS AND POLITICIANS.

3. GOVERNMENT CONCERN OVER THIS GROWING THREAT TO POLITICAL STABILITY WAS EVIDENCED DRAMATICALLY ON MAY 29 WHEN PRESIDENT BANZER CUT SHORT VISIT TO COCHABAMBA IN ORDER TO RETURN TO LA PAZ FOR POST-MIDNIGHT CONFERENCE WITH MILITARY HIGH COMMAND. SUBSEQUENTLY, BANZER CONFERRED WITH MILITARY AND SECURITY OFFICIALS THROUGHOUT DAY OF MAY 30 BEFORE DEPARTING THAT EVENING

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FOR SANTA CRUZ. MINISTER OF INTERIOR HAS BEEN HIGHLY ACTIVE IN PAST FEW DAYS, VISITING SCENE OF DISTURBANCES IN SUCRE AND ISSUING FREQUENT DENOUNCEMENTS OF "SUBVERSIVE" ACTIVITY IN STUDENT AND LABOR CIRCLES. VARIOUS GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE CANCELLED THEIR PLANS TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE BOLIVIA OR TO INTERIOR OF COUNTRY AS GOB PREPARES MEASURES TO DEAL WITH PRESENT SITUATION.

4. COMMENT. RELIABLE EMBASSY SOURCE INFORMS US THAT

BANZER RETURN FROM COCHABAMBA WAS DUE TO DISCOVERY OF ASSASSINATION PLOT THERE, WHICH WAS TO SET OFF COUP LED BY ONE OR TWO REGIMENTS, UNION STRIKES AND STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS. BANZER TOLD MILITARY LEADERS HE COULD UNDERSTAND LEFT OR OPPOSITION PARTIES TRYING TO KILL HIM, BUT NOT MEMBERS OF HIS OWN MILITARY INSTITUTION. SUBSEQUENTLY HE TOLD THIS IN RESERVE TO FALANGE TOP LEADERSHIP AND DECISION WAS TAKEN TO HAVE FALANGE COME OUT IN MOBILIZATION IN SUPPORT OF BANZER, HOLDING MILITARY IN RESERVE FOR LATER CONTINGENCIES. MNR NOT TRUSTED BECAUSE OF ALLEGED LINKS TO COUP PLOT OF SILES, OTHER EXILED MNR LEADERS: GOB FEARED SOME IN-COUNTRY MNR LEADERS MIGHT HAVE LINKS TO COUP PLOTTERS.

5. IN PLOT ARE SOME MILITARY OFFICERS (UNKNOWN) WHOM IDENTITY BANZER HIMSELF IS CURRENTLY HOPING TO DETERMINE. SUSPICIONS EXIST THAT SOMEONE AT HIGH LEVEL IS PATRONIZING THESE OFFICERS, SINCE IN BOLIVIA NO ONE ATTEMPTS A COUP UNLESS THERE IS SOMEONE IN THE GOVERNMENT TO "HOLD OPEN THE DOOR" FOR HIM. SOME FEELING THAT KEY SENIOR OFFICER RESPONSIBLE MAY BE MENDIETA OR GENERAL ALVAREZ. SOME PROPAGANDA SHEETS REPORTEDLY CIRCULATING IN ARMED FORCES CALLING FOR JUNIOR OFFICERS TO ASSUME COMMAND. ALSO, THERE IS SUSPICION AMONG LOYAL ARMY OFFICERS THAT NUMBER OF OFFICERS IN POLICE FORCES, JUST BELOW SENIOR LEVEL, ARE INVOLVED IN THE COUP PLOTTING. EVIDENCE OF PRIOR ORGANIZATION OUTSIDE BACKING ALSO FOUND AT SUCRE, WHERE SOME OF STUDENTS THROWING MOLOTOV COCKTAILS AT POLICE WERE FOUND TO HAVE INSTRUCTION SHEETS ON HOW TO MAKE THESE, HOW TO FORM BARRICADES, PROTECT SELVES AGAINST TEAR GAS, ET.

6. BANZER ASKED THAT FSB, OTHER CIVILIAN SUPPORTERS OF REGIME GIVE HIM "THREE OR FOUR DAYS" TO DISCOVER WHO IS INVOLVED IN PLANNED COUP. CARLOS VALVERDE ALSO IS REPORTED TO BE CONFIDENTIAL

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IN COUNTRY, AND IS VERY LIKELY INVOLVED IN WHATEVER IS GOING ON.
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